The Electronic Whole Earth Catalog

CD-ROM for the Macintosh

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The **Electronic Whole Earth Catalog** (EWEC) is a functional index to many hard-to-find books, products, magazines and organizations. Its tone is at once irreverent, scholarly, serious and as slapstick as they come. If Robin Williams were a CD-ROM, this would be it.

This electronic encyclopedia of mail-order sources also contains over 4,000 digitized pictures of book covers, record jackets, illustrations, drawings, photographs, maps and diagrams.

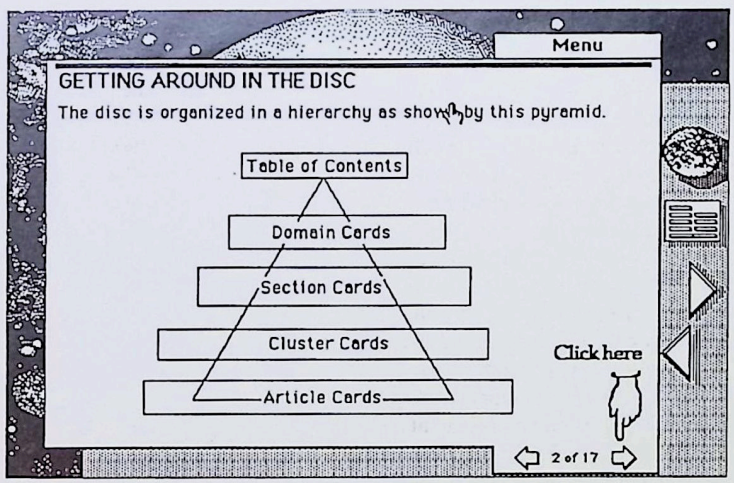
But that's not all. You can listen to 500 or more digitized samples of audio information. These range from "(I'm on the) Top of the World" played on the ever-popular musical saw to an interactive demonstration of the Roland D5 synthesizer. You can try listening to a sample of Turkish from a language tutorial or identifying birds from their calls.

The 60-second samples are "like looking at just one paragraph from a book," as the release notes state, but it is surprisingly enough to get an idea of what the complete work may be like. The samples were recorded with Farallon's MacRecorder. Depending on what Macintosh hardware configuration you are using, the sounds may be better or worse. They are very memory intensive, though. A check of the "Release Notes" included on the CD is in order. They make several good suggestions to avoid dreaded system bombs, recommending turning off all unnecessary desk accessories, macros and the like.

Most entries also contain thoughtful reviews by experts in the field, but only their names, not their credentials are always noted. For example, the article on "How to Buy a Telescope" is by Andrew Fraknoi. Unless you happen to read further articles in the astronomy "cluster," you might not know that Fraknoi is the Executive Director of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific and, thus, well-qualified to deliver an opinion on telescopes.

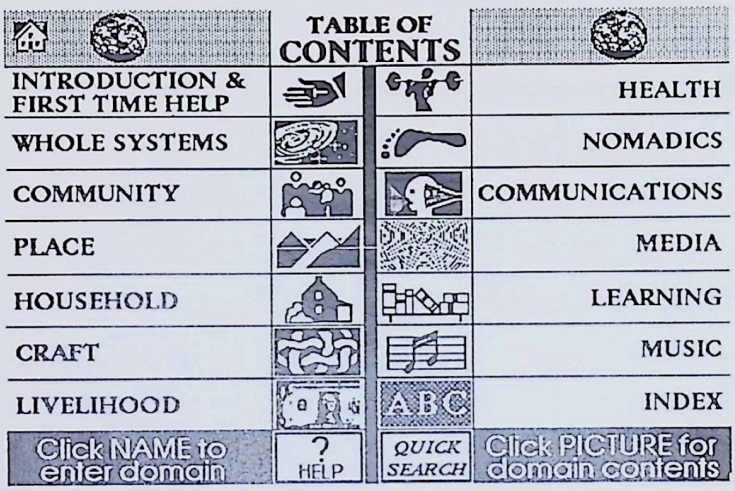
The information is organized into the hierarchy shown in Figure 1. There are 13 "Domains," such as Health, Nomadics, Communications, Media and Learning. The domains are represented by various icons. Clicking on a domain icon will bring you to the "Section" level. For example, clicking on the Whole Systems domain brings us to the following choices on the section level: Space, Gaia, Evolution, Ecology, Plants, Animals, Civilization and Cybernetics. If we click on the Animals section, we'll go to the next hierarchical level, the "Cluster" card. Here are related clusters of articles: Invertebrates, Reptiles, Swimmers, Birds, etc. Now we can click on the cluster card for Birds and then see a list of related articles on birds: Bird Guides, Bird Life and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. This level

FIGURE 1



Information is arranged in 13 broad Domains, which are subdivided into sections.

FIGURE 2



The Table of Contents featuring the 13 Domains

also shows various cross references to other locations in the EWEC, such as Poultry, Care of Exotic Birds and Pet Supplies. A click to the Cornell article brings us to a short commentary, access card (listing addresses and phone numbers) and an excerpt from the book/recording on bird songs. Several audio bird songs are included.

From this lowest level, we can jump out level by level or make a quantum leap all the way out to the index, the table of contents or the original Domains card. There is plentiful online help at all levels of the EWEC. The product also includes a short manual on use of the CD-ROM, plus the history of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, in all its permutations, print and non-print. A little more about the EWEC can be found in one of the two Table of Contents page "easter eggs" I discovered. An easter egg is a little programmer's surprise, sometimes under a hidden button. This particular one includes two people discussing the EWEC and the Macintosh. I bet one of the voices is Stewart Brand's; he originated the idea of the *Whole Earth Catalog* "in a plane over Nebraska, in 1968." He's the L.L. Bean of ideas and access points.

If you find a product or service you're interested in, (which will surely happen if you spend more than five minutes with this CD-ROM) you can print out an order form for it. It automatically puts in the name of the product, although you have to type in the price yourself. It is possible to highlight the price from the review, copy it into the clipboard and paste it into the correct area of the order form. Then the program looks at how many items you've ordered, multiplies by the unit cost, then adds everything up for you. You have to add your own sales tax. This section of the EWEC, like the recorded sounds, is another memory hog. To avoid annoying system hangs, you must check the release notes and follow their guidelines on RAM cache, inits and cdevs.

This CD-ROM is so close to perfect that I have few complaints. One thing is that I wish there were a way to control the volume of the speaker while within HyperCard. There are so many sounds in these stacks that it's a shame to miss any due to ambient room noise.

There should almost be a warning label affixed to this CD-ROM: "Addicting Reference Work! You may never see your family and friends again!" A second easter egg in the program reminds us of the truth: a woman's voice yells "come on now, everybody, let's leave your computers and go!" Maybe they should have that advice come on in automatic intervals!

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PRODUCT IN BRIEF

PRODUCT

The Electronic Whole Earth Catalog:
Access to Tools and Ideas—CD-ROM Version
HyperCard-based index to mail order sources for products, magazines, recordings and organizations.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Macintosh series computers with 1 megabyte of memory and 100% compatible CD-ROM drive. System software 4.2 or later. Uses HyperCard 1.2.2 (included). Optional: external amplified speaker or headphones, compatible printer, hard drive.

PRICE

$149.95

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Broderbund, 17 Paul Drive, San Rafael, CA 94903-2101; 415/492-3500 or 800/521-6263